

ISLAM

The Lost Truth

Islam, a path that has touched the lives of so many but to this day remains an untold experience. What you are about to read is a brief account of a faith that has offered the most noble directives for humanity; the world's second largest religion and most talked about ideology, and yet it is marked with misinformation and spin by an extremist few and a media machine adamant on smearing a religion that promotes universal harmony and lasting peace.

The pursuit of happiness unites us all and threads a central commonality between all human beings. Yet, whilst we all affirm this fundamental truth, we witness today a world afflicted by growing suffering and injustice; intolerance and oppression; death and destruction. Moments of happiness are but short-lived memories connected to an inner desire to achieve harmony between unique individual experiences and a social spirit that propels mankind, as a whole, towards its ultimate goal.

What is the purpose of life? The answers that we provide in response to this question are reflected in how we look upon ourselves and the world around us. Some have asserted that life is no more than a result of an accident of 'nature' with a goal undefined reducing the objectives of mankind to the securing of its lower material needs; with death marking the end to an incredibly short and seemingly meaningless life. Islam differs with such trends and affirms the notion of an intrinsic beauty and purpose to life by virtue of it being created by a God who is free of all imperfections, and infinite in power and wisdom:

What! did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us? – [Holy Qur'an, Chapter 23, Verse 115]

The word Islam derives from 'salam', which means peace and 'taslim' meaning submission. The word Islam points to the principle on which the entire religion is based - submission to the will of God. This submission results in a state of peace between man, universe and their Creator. As such, submission not only assumes verbal testimony but embraces proper conduct in our association with fellow human beings and the cosmos as is eloquently expressed in a narration by Imam Ali, the successor to the Prophet of Islam:

"Islam is submission, submission is conviction, conviction is affirmation, affirmation is acknowledgment, acknowledgement is discharge (of obligations), and discharge of obligations is action."

Belief in the Oneness of God, Tawheed, forms the foundation of Islam. It is the assertion of the unity and incomparability of God, Allah, together with the denial of divinity to all other than Him. It is not simply the affirmation of mathematical unity; a rejection of plurality of gods. Tawheed establishes that all the qualities and attributes of divinity belong exclusively to Allah. God alone is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Source of Guidance, the Nourisher, the Sovereign and the Eternal. He alone is utterly self-sufficient, infinite in power and wisdom, and all else stands in need of Him for its origination and its sustenance. He alone is worthy of worship and of obedience. Whoever consistently and thoroughly submits to Him in all things is thereby liberated from the servitude of created beings.

This central principle of the Islamic faith relates human beings to their Origin and guides them throughout their lives by clearly defining to them their ultimate objective. A goal that can be summed up as being: the optimisation of human life through enrichment of its foundations with the Divine qualities.

Tawheed as an outlook of human existence affirms the equality and unity of all human beings in their relation with God. He is the Lord of all human beings. He is not the God of a specific community or a particular tribe which may enjoy special privileges over other communities and tribes through His patronage; all are equal before Him.

The Islamic belief in Prophethood derives from the belief that God, as the Creator and Guide of mankind, has never left mankind without the means to know His will and to fulfil the purposes for which He has created them. He has sent prophets to instruct them and act as the agents of His guidance. The history of prophethood originates with that of humanity itself; Adam, the first human, was also the first prophet. Muslims hold in high esteem all the divinely sent prophets; affirm their infallibility; and believe in the identical message that they all preached as an essential part of their faith.

The Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace), the Prophet of Islam, was the personality in whom the whole history of revelation and prophethood reached its culmination; he was the most perfect of humans. His whole life and character radiated the truths and message of Islam with a brilliance that still shines today. As the seal of prophets, the message and mission taught by him is both universal and eternal in its validity. There has not been and will not be any prophet or messenger after him. He had a character as lofty as his mission; marked above all by balance between total immersion in the divine presence and committed engagement in the affairs of humanity. As the final message of guidance to mankind, the teachings of Islam as preached by Prophet Muhammad are safeguarded from distortion by the will of Allah, through the guidance of divinely appointed successors to the final prophet.

Islam teaches that each and every soul is born sinless and that none will be held accountable for the deeds of another. The 'nature' of human beings, like the entire created order, is naturally in a state of submission to the will of God. The message of Islam, far from being detached from the natural instincts of mankind, in fact appeals to its natural dispositions; both as individual and society. Reason and free will are regarded as divine gifts provided to human beings: a sign of their nobility using which they choose to willingly submit to the will of God. The Prophet of Islam encapsulated his mission in the famous words: ***"I have been commissioned to perfect the best of morals"***. He emphasised the importance that Islam provides to the innate ethical sense of human identity and a wider moral order to existence. From the Islamic perspective, both the heavenly bliss and torments of punishment experienced in the Afterlife are mere reflections of our alignment to our ethical conscience as individuals, and a moral order that presides over the whole of creation.

We hope this article has given you an insight into the religion of Islam and its basic tenets. We invite you to think and ponder closely over its teachings and assess their conformity with sound logic. Islam's all-embracing program looks to elevate humanity to the peaks of perfection by directing the consciences of humankind towards their Creator. Its spiritual journey is epitomised in the daily prayer performed five times a day during which, Muslims throughout the globe face in one direction and in submission to their Creator begin by pronouncing: **'God is Most Great.'**

"O mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in Gods sight is the greatest of you in piety." [Holy Quran 49:13]

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